



# Letters

**We've always known *Shopper* readers were a decent bunch, but this month you've excelled yourselves with your neighbourliness, your good advice and your concern for the future of human kind**

## NETWORK NEIGHBOURS



Having read numerous pieces on wireless broadband security in *Shopper*, I have made sure my wireless router is protected. I changed the SSID from the default and made sure it wasn't broadcast. I've enabled WPA encryption, the firewall is on, only wireless adaptors with listed MAC addresses can access the network and so on.

I wasn't surprised to see that a neighbour's unprotected wireless router was visible in Microsoft's wireless utility. However, I was surprised when, while trying to connect to my router screen, I accidentally accessed theirs.

My router had stopped responding so I typed in <http://192.168.1.1> to see what was going on, and up came a configuration screen for my neighbour's BT Voyager. My wireless adaptor had latched on to their network. I have now changed settings, so this won't happen again.

I decided to email them to urge them to switch on their router's security features – the Voyager configuration screen helpfully provided their email address. I even took some screenshots of the configuration screens, to prove how open their wireless signal was to potential abuse.

My altruism met no response and the router still sits there, announcing its unprotected status to the neighbourhood. Even telling them that someone else could use their broadband for free, reducing the amount they could download before they hit the ISP's monthly cap, didn't help.

Gavin Hay

It's astonishing how many of us have neighbours with unprotected wireless networks. Someone we know accidentally ran a wireless network without protection for a few weeks before realising that someone was using it to surf the web. They activated WEP encryption and, a few days later, a cheeky neighbour knocked on their door asking if they would mind sharing their wireless broadband.

You've done more to help than anyone would realistically expect, and you should be commended for your attempts to look out for your neighbours.

We only hope they don't fall foul of less scrupulous people, who could use this 'free' connection to download illegal files and get the innocent but negligent operators into trouble with the law.

If you wanted to become a wireless vigilante, you could equip a handheld computer or laptop with a wireless card and a free copy of wireless network detection utility NetStumbler ([www.netstumbler.com](http://www.netstumbler.com)) and roam your local streets looking for similar networks.

You could even home in on the neighbour whose network you accidentally accessed, as NetStumbler has a signal strength meter. We wouldn't like to guess how well they would receive your visit, but you might be able to offer your wireless security services for a small fee.

## SOUND AND FURY

I've been looking for some good-quality equipment for transferring my analogue Hi8 home video tapes to my hard disk. I read your review in *What's New, Shopper*, November 2005, of the Creative Sound Blaster Video Editor with

relish, as it appears to be the very thing I've been looking for.

However, I don't know whether it's worth getting, as your reviewer Ben Pitt says its minus point is "noisy audio in analogue video capture". How bad is this noisy audio? The product must still be worth buying to be a Best Buy. Is it that the noise is not too bad, but could be better, or is the quality really poor? Is it a result of inferior sound quality in the first place, and Ben is an ardent audiophile, or is it worth buying only for digital video because analogue audio is so bad?

Neil Avery

The video capture and audio interface (sound card) parts of the Creative Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS Video Edition are entirely separate, so the video capture section has its own audio inputs. These were noticeably noisier than the audio interface's inputs, which was disappointing. Unfortunately, we didn't measure these noise levels in decibels.

However, we doubt that most people would find the noise level a problem in practice as VHS tapes and camcorder footage is likely to have quite a lot of noise already. Also Ben is, as you guessed, an audio bore – we mean "ardent audiophile".

## INKY FIGURES

I was intrigued by your laser printer test in *Shopper*, November 2005. I own a Xerox Phaser 8400DP so was intrigued to see how the 8500AN stacked up against the competition. I was completely at a loss as to how you calculated the three-year ownership costs, particularly when the Phaser came out so far above the others.

I have owned my printer for 18 months and have used only £444 worth of supplies to print 19,460 pages. I am just about to order new supplies, so I know this figure is pretty accurate. My costs include a maintenance kit that still has a 70 per cent life, five black ink sticks and three colour ones that haven't been used yet and about the same amount of consumables in the machine, which came with it.

I estimate that to print the same number of pages the Magicolor 2400W, which won the test, would have consumed four high-capacity toner cartridges of each colour at 4,500 pages each and at a cost of £1,336, as well as at least one drum costing £123.90. So the total cost is just short of £1,500, which is more than I paid for the printer and all the consumables. I got my prices from [www.inkmasters.co.uk/acatalog/Minolta\\_QMS\\_Magicolor\\_2400W\\_Laser\\_Toner\\_Cartridges.html](http://www.inkmasters.co.uk/acatalog/Minolta_QMS_Magicolor_2400W_Laser_Toner_Cartridges.html).

I also note that each of the light user costs is the same as the cost of the printer, or only slightly more. I assume this figure doesn't include the cost of the printer over the three years, as the Dell actually costs less over the three years than it does to buy. I am therefore at a loss as to how you came up with a figure of £793 for the Phaser.

I would really like an explanation of how you came up with the costs, and what you classify as light, medium and heavy use.

Eric Sutherland

For a colour laser, we estimate light use to be 800 mono and 400 colour pages per year, medium use as 6,000 mono and 3,000 colour pages a year, and heavy use as 24,000 mono and 12,000 colour pages per year. Our total ownership cost includes the purchase price of each printer, plus the cost

## WRITE IN – AND WIN!

This month Adobe has launched a new bundle of software that includes the brand new version of Photoshop Elements. It has kindly agreed to give a copy to this month's star letter writer, furnishing Gavin with a powerful graphics program familiar to professional graphic designers, as well as the top-notch video-editing package Premiere Elements 2.0. Photoshop Elements 4.0 lets you edit and enhance your digital photos easily and effectively, while Premiere Elements makes it simple to edit your own home movies like a pro.



**PLUS!** Every letter-writer also receives a *Computer Shopper* mug





of the consumables you'd need to buy in order to print the relevant quantities of mono and colour pages. The figures take into account the life of the consumables supplied with the printer. Many lasers won't require any consumables during three years' light use, but the Phaser 8500AN ships with enough ink for only 1,000 mono and 1,000 colour pages.

To print 2,400 mono pages and 1,200 colour pages over three years, we calculate that the £532 Phaser 8500AN would require a £65 pack of six black inks and a pack of three inks in each colour, which comes to £196. This gives a total cost of £793. We should point out that plenty of ink would be left at this point – enough to print at least 4,000 more mono pages, for example.

We base our calculations on manufacturer yield figures for five per cent page coverage in each colour, but this gives only an estimation of real-world costs, which could be higher or lower. You've paid less than we'd expect from Xerox's prices and yield figures, and would probably have achieved equivalent savings with any of the printers in our review. Your calculations for the Magiccolour 2400W assume that each colour would cover five per cent of every page, making a total coverage of 20 per cent. It's unlikely that typical use would consume anything like this amount of toner.

In the case of the Dell Laser Printer C3100cn, the purchase price we used in our calculations was too low, so each of its ownership cost figures should have been £6 higher. This was due to a last-minute price change.

### GO-FASTER STRIPES

Having read Josh Blodwell's article about painting an old computer case (*PC Builder*, *Shopper* November 2005), I was left wondering how many anoraks someone would need to possess for him (it would have to be a man, wouldn't it?) to spend the best part of a weekend dismantling, stripping, sanding, priming, sanding, painting, waxing and so on, just so that his boringly beige PC can have a colourful makeover worthy of *Changing Rooms*?

Then I remembered that some years ago my daughter's (now ex-) boyfriend bought a well-used Vauxhall Nova hatchback. He'd wanted a model with a go-faster stripe, but that would have cost another £300-£400. "No problem," he told me, "this'll be just as good once I've resprayed it, changed the wheels, carpets, seats, steering-wheel, dash, headlamps and gear lever and had the engine bored-out to a 1.6."

I can see him now, high on aerosols and trying to wipe away the spray that drifted on to my dining table.

Ronald Simpson

☹ It takes a certain kind of geek to go to such efforts, it's true. As you observe, hobbyists can be found in many different areas. Some spend their time under cars, others prefer taking a Dremel to their PC case. The popularity of the TV series *Scrapheap Challenge* shows that loads of people are excited by engineering, even if only vicariously.

PC customisers are particularly well catered for, and the market for gadgets designed to help you create an individual PC has grown enormously in the past couple of years. In our last readers' survey

we asked if anyone would be interested in a regular *PC Builder* article, and lots of you said yes.

As we'll show you over the coming months, there's more to customising your PC than adding a paint job, go-faster stripes and flashing LEDs. You can make your own unusual cases, too. This month we show you how to force a PC into a domestic DVD player case, but the possibilities are limited only by your imagination. We've seen a PC running inside an ammunition box before (see picture).

### THE SPIES ARE THE LIMIT

I have read several articles relating to spyware and adware and the problems associated with them. For years I've been using the internet and have always been aware of viruses, adware, spyware and have always used the free versions of Spybot and Ad-Aware without any problems.

I also installed Spyware Doctor, which found things that shouldn't have been there. I ran Spybot again and it found things that Spyware Doctor had missed. I then ran Spy Sweeper and this found some cookies that both had missed.

Next I decided to try the free Microsoft AntiSpyware, which found only the P2P client BearShare. As I don't use BearShare and haven't

got round to uninstalling it, I

chose to ignore it. I've previously used Spybot to remove the spyware that BearShare installs.

How is it that no single piece of software out there can remove 100 per cent of all known spyware and adware?

I have decided to try Mozilla Firefox and am quite impressed with it so far, but I wish that I, and everyone else for that matter, could browse the internet without the threat of spyware, adware, viruses and the like. Lets hope Microsoft's forthcoming Internet Explorer 7 will eradicate all these problems and allow us to surf safely at last.

David Forrest

☹ Spyware and viruses are certainly a danger to all web surfers, experienced or otherwise. Unfortunately, we can't foresee a time when we'll be able to surf in peace without having to worry about hidden threats, as we could in the old days.

The people who create these nasty programs work around the clock to make sure their new efforts can bypass the protective measures we use, such as anti-virus and anti-spyware software. No single product is 100 per cent effective because the anti-virus and anti-spyware companies are constantly reacting to new problems, whereas the baddies are coming up with new ideas all the time.

Internet Explorer 7 will doubtless reduce some of the current problems, as Firefox does, but bear in mind that the virus-writers and other idiots will already be taking this impending launch into account and have been playing with the beta version of the browser for some time. We can expect new problems to appear soon.

Firefox is not immune to problems either, and in this month's *Newsfile* (page 276) we report that security company Symantec claims that Firefox can "no longer be considered a safer browser than Microsoft's Internet Explorer". Our current



▲ Fast as a bullet: this ammunition box actually contains a customised PC

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advice is to use a combination of anti-spyware tools alongside a decent anti-virus scanner.

We recommend Kaspersky Anti-Virus Personal 5 or F-Secure Anti-Virus 2005. Look out for a new round of anti-virus and anti-spyware software group tests early in 2006.

## PHISH OFF!

About a year ago I realised that I couldn't stop the stream of phishy emails I received from people trying to grab my personal details and leave me a pauper. My task became to identify these contemptible emails as they arrived in my inbox and minimise my emotional trauma as I read that I must confirm a payment for \$15,000 that had just been authorised out of my PayPal account for an amazing sex aid.

My idea was to buy a domain name. I needed a domain name provider that offered free catch-all email divert services. Having got this domain name for just £6.95 for two years, I then gave every person and organisation who asked for my email address a unique address based on their details. For example, *Computer Shopper* would contact me using [computersshopper@mydomain.co.uk](mailto:computersshopper@mydomain.co.uk). The email catch-all feature meant that every email was diverted to my usual email address.

Now I know at a glance who is communicating with me and, if the email address doesn't match the source, I know it might be a phishing email or spam.

Here are a few examples of how this has helped me. Today I got an email, apparently from eBay, claiming that my account would be closed if I didn't click on the link provided and give my eBay details. Guess what? It came from an address I gave to an online health and safety forum, which I identified easily because the name of the forum was in the email address. I have also found out that an insurance company has apparently sold my email address to a spamming marketing organisation. The company found it very difficult to refute this when I pointed out that the 'sent to' address on the spam I had received was unique to their company.

I hope this is a useful tip for *Computer Shopper* readers.  
*Humphrey Klinkenberg*

Using email addresses like this is a good idea, particularly for trapping people who sell your details. It's worth bearing in mind that people can get your email address in other ways, though. Companies store customer email addresses in databases, and databases can be hacked.

It's up to the company to decide which is more embarrassing – admitting to being hacked or pretending that it sold your details. Either way, it is possibly in breach of the Data Protection Act, which requires that anyone processing personal information must keep data secure.

One major pain you may find when running a catch-all account with a domain is that spammers will pile messages into your inbox using randomly generated usernames. As we write this, our mail server log shows that it has turned away thousands of emails, including some addressed to:

[stefan.ramlow@syng1.com](mailto:stefan.ramlow@syng1.com) and [stefan.vipond@ourdomain.com](mailto:stefan.vipond@ourdomain.com). Spammers are happy to use enormous lists of guessed addresses.

If you start getting too much spam, you may have to take control of your mail forwarding rules and enter a new one into your provider's web interface every time you make up a new email address. This is time consuming, but it's better than downloading hundreds of spams a day.

## WE'RE DOOMED

We have all seen sci-fi films such as *Terminator* and particularly *I, Robot*, where computers act on their own instincts and take over the world. But is artificial intelligence actually possible and, if so, will it actually be the end of the human race?

*Douglas Morton*

That is quite a complicated question, particularly because artificial intelligence means different things to different people. The internet Artificial Intelligence FAQ points out that, "one persistent 'problem' is that as soon as an AI technique truly succeeds, in the minds of many it ceases to be AI, becoming something like Engineering. For example, when Deep Blue defeated [chess grandmaster] Kasparov, there were many who said Deep Blue wasn't AI, since after all it was just a brute force parallel minimax search, despite minimax search being one of the great early successes of AI."

If we go into the realms of science fiction and assume that one day we'll be able to create robot brains capable of completely independent thought, emotions and ambitions, it's possible that one or more of these brains could become despotic. How empowered a dictatorial machine could become very much depends on what it's connected to.

For example, a global defence network controlled by the brain of a child, as seen in the movie *WarGames*, is likely to be a dangerous thing capable of taking over the world, or at least destroying it. However, the intelligent toaster in *Red Dwarf* may be cleverer and have greater ambition, but it lacks the facilities to act on this ambition effectively. Even if an army of toasters

were able to coordinate themselves, the worst they could do is deny us toast en masse. Or bury us in it.

The real question is that if we develop potentially dangerous artificial intelligence, would anyone be dumb enough to connect it to dangerous hardware? Judging by the way some countries are happy to throw GM crops and stem cells around, we'd guess that the human race's days are numbered.



▲ The toaster: a threat to humankind?

## AN APOLOGY

In *Computer Shopper*, September 2005, we published a letter from Dr Mark McClean about copying digital video files to CD and DVD. We would like to apologise for the flippancy of our reply. In particular, we sincerely regret the facetious heading given to the letter.

We would like to clarify that our advice regarding the legality of copying DVDs was meant as general advice to *Computer Shopper* readers. It was not our intention to accuse Dr McClean of breaking the law. ☹